

private sector where therefore viewed as partners, rather than drivers of the public space management agenda. By contrast, these more proactive local authorities increasingly saw their role as the guardians of a more controlled environment, in what they saw as the interests of the majority, rather than of any particular groups.

The reality seems to be more complex than much of the literature would have us believe, and indeed that in a minority of places, the type of more integrated, negotiated and nuanced approaches to public space management that contemporary public space seem to require are beginning to be delivered. Rather than a battle between private- and public-sector interests, with the community squeezed out altogether, the reality is more often a limited transfer of powers to a range of stakeholders, with the public sector still in the driving seat. In such places, authorities are more concerned to establish a seamless network of public space that is all subject to the same high standards of management, rather than, necessarily, continuous public ownership or management responsibility.

To some degree these new collaborative arrangements seem to be emerging strongly (if inconsistently) in this field of public sector management because public space management is a new area of policy. It suggests a new acceptance of the need to structure services and policies around an emerging view of public space as a holistic entity, and the focus for policy. In turn, this more defined policy focus on public spaces is placing these services in a better position to argue for greater attention and resources, whilst the emergence of multi-sector public space management mechanisms such as town centre management, area management partnerships, neighbourhood management schemes, and (most controversially) BIDs, are the clearest examples of this.

Management on the ground: exceptional practice

In Chapters 9 and 10, the opportunity was taken to explore the implications of one of these models – BIDs – through an analysis of Times Square and Leicester Square/Piccadilly Circus. On both sides of the Atlantic, this new market-centred delivery vehicle is being used to manage these iconic civic spaces; spaces that at one time or another have faced all the pressures (and critiques) explored in the public space literature. The analysis suggested that to a greater or lesser extent the spaces conform to the characteristics so often ascribed to contemporary public space – displacement of some groups, homogenisation and commodification, surveillance and control, and a reduction in elements that foster civility and community. Moreover, that these characteristics are both fostered and legitimised by the management models being adopted.

Yet, despite these characteristics, several positive aspects could also be identified. First, the cited historic functions of urban public space

were all still evident, even though actors and symbols had changed. Second, while there is a clear trend towards the facilitation of commerce via consumption in these spaces – encouraged by the management practices – consumption itself fosters scope for civility and community, for example, through cafés, restaurants and shops (for those that can afford to consume). Indeed, it can be argued that consumption of globalised brands and entertainment remain a popular choice for city users, giving in the process new meaning to public space in a context where elsewhere it is being eschewed. Third, arguably, the majority also have a preference for omnipresent management and surveillance in public space, whilst, to some degree the contemporary characteristics of these spaces also give order to an otherwise often fragmented public realm.

Fourth, in each of the spaces, the characteristics that gave them their status and reputation in the first place had largely been preserved, and continue to include a rich variety of activities and obvious tolerance for difference and diversity. Finally, in each case the management regimes have charted a deliberate path ‘up-market’, which has contributed to the displacement of some dispossessed groups (particularly in Times Square). However, with this, have come benefits for tourists, performers, businesses and the other everyday users of these public spaces.

The analysis revealed that, although still a legitimate cause for concern, the extension of private involvement to the management of public space does not automatically lead to high levels of intolerance and control and to an irreconcilable shift in the balance of power in public space. Instead, it confirmed that even in the most high-profile examples of where this is happening, the characteristics that make public space ‘public’ are typically robust. It confirmed that the shift to a more market-led approach can even reduce the control required on public space through pursuit of the sorts of liveable qualities sought in Chapter 1 (see Table 1.2). In this respect, the more balanced public/private approach so far seen in Leicester Square and Piccadilly Circus, where the public sector has been able to reclaim large areas of space from private traffic, may be better able to lever the advantages of both sectors, to the benefit of both, and the wider community.

The international context: adding value

Moving from this explicitly localised view on the practices and paradoxes of public space management, to a broader world-view, and at the same time from a focus on internationally iconic public space, to everyday public space, it is possible to draw out recommendations for future practice with broader relevance. In England, the interplay of national initiatives and local responses is undoubtedly shaping a new policy field that is more effective, integrated, responsive to local circumstances, and confident about its role